



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
September 1, 2010

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## CARDIN STATEMENT ON DIRECT MIDDLE EAST PEACE TALKS

*Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD), a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, released the following statement on the beginning of direct talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in Washington, D.C.*

"The restarting of direct talks between Israelis and Palestinians is a positive step forward in the Middle East Peace Process. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Mahmoud Abbas, along with the leaders of Egypt and Jordan, have come to Washington in good faith to renew discussions on how to move forward as neighbors toward creating a stable and sustainable two-state solution. I am heartened to see the United States continue to act as an honest broker in this process.

"The Palestinian Authority's participation in this week's talks is encouraging. But for peace to truly take hold their leaders also must be committed to speaking out within Gaza and the West Bank against those, particularly Hamas, who would like these and any peace talks to fail. We cannot allow extremists to remain an obstacle to peace. Israel has consistently shown a commitment to a long-term peace and now is the time for the Palestinian Authority to do the same.

"Now that U.S. efforts in Iraq are winding down, there is an opportunity for us to truly foster a productive process towards peace in the Middle East. The U.S. and Israel have always shared the same goals: to restart the peace process and prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear state. It is imperative that we do all that is possible to protect our shared values and joint national interests."

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